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Partners Preserve Over 440 Acres in Middleborough *Collaboration protects drinking water, wildlife habitat*

MIDDLEBOROUGH - Conservation partners representing the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the town of Middleborough, and the city of New Bedford gathered today to celebrate protection of more than 440 acres of woods and wetlands that safeguard an important regional water supply and preserve valuable wildlife habitat.

Officials marked the occasion at ceremony hosted by Edward Parks, the longtime landowner of Black Brook Ranch who recently sold 230 acres along the brook to the Department of Fish and Game in a bargain sale. Parks also sold permanent conservation restrictions on 160 acres of forest and hayfields to TNC, the town of Middleborough, and the city of New Bedford. In addition, Robert and Rollande Cardin of Middleborough sold a conservation restriction on nearly 50 acres of adjacent forestland with considerable frontage on Black Brook.

"Protection of high quality habitat is a top priority of mine, and we are grateful for the help of conservationists such as Mr. Parks and the Cardins, as well as the town of Middleborough, the city of New Bedford, and The Nature Conservancy," said Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Mary Griffin. "I am happy to report that the Patrick administration is committing at least \$50 million annually for the next five years to land protection so that efforts such as this will continue."

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The partnership to conserve these properties was motivated by the extraordinary natural resources of Black Brook, the primary source of fresh water for the eastern half of the Assawompset Ponds. The ponds host the largest river herring run in New England, contain habitat for freshwater mussel species and nesting bald eagles, and provide clean drinking water for nearly 200,000 people in New Bedford, Taunton, Lakeville, Bridgewater, Acushnet, Freetown, Dighton, Berkley, Dartmouth, and Fairhaven.

"This initiative helps safeguard our community water supply," said New Bedford Mayor Scott W. Lang. "The importance of protecting our most vital natural resource cannot be overstated. Our watershed must be protected for this and future generations."

The conservation restrictions on a combined 210 acres were purchased for a total of \$1.6 million, funded by \$800,000 in Drinking Water Supply Protection grants from the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and Department of Environmental Protection. This amount was matched by TNC, Middleborough and New Bedford. TNC's contribution was supported by the Sheehan Family Foundation and the Island Foundation.

The Department of Fish and Game purchased the 230 acres for \$410,000. The new acquisition, which will be open to recreational use, will be managed by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and known as the Black Brook Wildlife Management Area.

Parks sold his property interests at considerably less than full market value, allowing his family to maintain their working forests and hayfields, while protecting a large portion of this important area from further development. Development of the farmlands and forests would have negatively impacted water quality in Black Brook by decreasing groundwater recharge, increasing run-off pollution, and destroying and fragmenting wildlife habitat. These effects would, in turn, weaken the overall health of the watershed.

"We're especially grateful to Mr. Parks and Mr. and Mrs. Cardin, who demonstrate the very central role that individuals can play in sustaining our environment," said Wayne Klockner, The Nature Conservancy's Massachusetts State Director.

"I am thrilled that the hard work and collaboration of local and state entities has enabled us to protect an essential natural resource," said Senator Marc Pacheco (D-Taunton). "Preserving the Black Brook area is vital for protecting important wildlife, as well as providing our region's citizens with clean drinking water."

"Mr. Parks and Mr. and Mrs. Cardin have provided a great service to the people of New Bedford and Southeastern Massachusetts. They deserve and they have our deepest appreciation," said Rep. Antonio Cabral (D-New Bedford).

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"I commend Governor Patrick, his administration and all entities involved for their efforts in the protection of this territory for natural resources purposes," said Rep. John F. Quinn (D-Dartmouth). "This collaboration not only protects a valuable regional water supply, but preserves precious land from further development."

"We must make every effort to preserve our valuable natural resources especially areas next to public drinking water sources," said Rep. Robert M. Koczera (D-New Bedford). "I am pleased that the City of New Bedford is an active partner in this important endeavor."

"Preservation of valuable wetlands will help protect drinking water supplies and wildlife habitat. This land purchase meets those important public goals," said Rep. Bill Straus (D-Mattapoisett).

"Middleborough has been working to protect the land around the Assawompset Ponds for the last 25 years," Middleborough Town Planner Ruth Geoffroy said. "Open space and natural resource protection requires a long term commitment which our Town has made. We look forward to working with state agencies, conservation groups like The Nature Conservancy, our neighboring towns, and the cities of New Bedford and Taunton to protect additional critical properties in the watershed of the Ponds."

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